Spring 2017

Scrolls

CAN ARTISTS ELUCIDATE THE OPAQUENESS OF SOCIAL PROBLEMS? HOW?

EFFECT: When you hear a great song for the first time, does it hit you like a ton of bricks? Do you listen to the words? How about when you see an impactful image? Can it break your heart? Do you carry the weight of what you've seen for the rest of the day? Do you find it difficult to ignore? Do you need to learn more? Do you want to learn more? How can you not try to learn more? As a creator – do you have patience to play the long game? Are you ok with knowing that the audiences you interact with today might not act on what they learned for a while? Can you trust that they will apply the knowledge you shared? Are you comfortable with taking a public stand on social issues? Are you comfortable with their inherent nuances?

NUANCE: Do you view the world through polarized lens? Do most people? What are we overlooking? Do we all primarily function somewhere in the middle? Is this gray zone where the subtleties in our surroundings are revealed? the intricacies of our relationships? those of human nature? How can creative work highlight these nuances? How do we give context to the fragments of contrasting information surrounding us? Is that our job as cultural producers?

AUDIENCE: Who is the socially-engaged artist's audience? Is it everyone? Are those actively opposed worth your efforts? How about those who are neutral or passively opposed to the issue? Might they shift their position after exposure to personal stories, images or actions? Will this shift result in future action? Are you ok with doing the work without knowing its ultimate effect? Can you disarm yourself so that others will feel comfortable to come forward? Are you comfortable with getting off the fence and making a statement? How do you avoid shutting people out? Is it ok if you do? Do you want to please everyone? Can you be vulnerable? Are you ready for negative reactions?

"ART": How can you make "art," not "Art"? How can you avoid replicating someone else's efforts? Are you ready to let go of your ideas for the cause you're working towards? Are you willing to do the legwork that it takes to seek out people with similar objectives? Are you ready to plug into existing networks? If necessary, are you ready to build one from scratch? Are the people you're working with representative of the nuances of the issue, or rather do they exemplify your personal path and experiences? Can you be inclusive? Can you defer to individuals and communities with more knowledge on the issue? Can you acknowledge the ways in which you are privileged? Will you do this publicly? Are you comfortable with relinquishing authorship in order to make room for collaboration? Will you take on a supporting role? How can you use your interpersonal and creative skills to strengthen a community? Can you step back? Will you step back when the time comes to do so?

POSITIONS: Can you keep your eye on the big picture and avoid getting caught up in the challenging details? Are you ready to expand 'art-making' to include administrative work?
Can you share your skills with on-the-ground initiatives? Can you be generous? Can you let go of art world methods and language so that your project is accessible? Are you willing to function outside of art world institutions? Will you share the opportunities you have within art spaces with non-art collaborators and audiences? Are you able to see your work less as "Art" and more as a communication tool that connects emotions, histories, actions and people?
Does your work educate and open up access to knowledge at different levels? Do you view your role as an educator? An archivist? A vehicle? An organizer? Can art and community organizing be seen as mutually exclusive practices? Is there any aspect of our being that is not politicized? Is everything political in a state of emergency? Are we not always in a state of emergency?

YAELLE AMIR

HOW DO ARTISTS THINK? HOW DO THEY TEACH?

The time for angry laments about how offensive, tacky, racist, and sexist President-elect (ick!) Trump's behavior can be is OVER. Yes, it's painful when our issues, our values, and our candidate lose out to larger forces, but shit happens and complaining on Facebook about the political behemoth that hit us won't change anything. Drowning our sorrows at endless art world soirees or burying ourselves in studios that few of us can afford are dead ends. We can't all move to Canada. So what now?

The time for thinking about how the imminent political shift will impact the lives and livelihoods of artists is upon us. Besides having to listen to a lot of stupid things Trump says and worrying about whether he is going to bring on nuclear war with a midnight tweet, we need to talk about what is going to happen to us as citizens, as inhabitants of an endangered planet, and as artists. It is pretty clear that Trump's brand of politics entails curtailment of civil liberties — which directly affects artists' ability to function. Some of us are old enough to remember when the work of Jack Smith, Robert Mapplethorpe, Karin Finley, Marlon Riggs, Andres Serrano, and others were the targets of right-wing legal crusades and that all those annoying trigger warning signs about adult content in today's museums are the vestiges of those skirmishes. Anyone who thinks political correctness is bad should try talking to Congress about art for a taste of real suffering.

Trump's plans for tax breaks for the rich and trashing of Obamacare are going to make life harder for most artists to stay alive. We need to think of what to do — collectively.

We need to think about how to be effective and how to be relevant and stop believing, as too many artists do, that we can just find a way to sell more art and save ourselves individually. A strike might seem like a weird fit for artists who don't toil on assembly lines, but let us push our imaginations beyond the clichés about what strikes are like. Just ignore the crabby pundits who say that artists and celebrities are just grandstanding — no one can build a movement without a public airing of issues that can be recognized as collective grievances.

Helen Molesworth reminds us in Work Ethic that we may think of strikes as calls to halt production in order to protest wages and working conditions, but they are, in a deeper sense, a powerful way of saying NO. In an artists' metaphoric strike, she explains, art making doesn't stop, but it is withheld from the art market's system of commodification and display. Instead, artists redirect their focus — for a moment at least — to relate what they do to other economic and ideological systems. What does that mean? American artists have, in the past, mobilized most frequently around issues pertaining to the institutions in which they work (i.e. museums and galleries), but they have also organized protests against the Vietnam War and public health policies that failed during the AIDS Crisis. Artists were central to Occupy Wall Street and helped to put the plights of distant victims of neoliberal policies and practices onto the front page of the New York Times. So what could happen now — even for just a day?

What does an anti-Trump agenda look like? For one thing, could we devote some energy to thinking about how art and artists are embedded, whether we like it or not, in economic and social networks that surround and sustain Trump?
I don't mean the neo-Nazi screamers at the rallies (they are an easy target) — I mean the billionaires from Wall Street and the oil industry who are about to take over the government and privatize our public parks, schools, and hospitals, and pollute our air, soil, and water. Ivanka isn't the only one in the new political establishment with contemporary art on her walls, and she isn't taking those paintings down anyway. The Wall Street financiers who stand to gain from Trump are the same ones who have thrown bundles of cash into art and have driven up New York rents to the point that most artists can't afford workspace, living space, or decent food. Can anything be done to throw a wrench in that? In the 1960s, some very savvy artists demanded more rights over what happened to their art once it left their hands and landed in museums and secondary auctions. Right now some tough-minded performers are saying NO to providing entertainment at Trump's Inauguration. Can visual artists imagine analogous ways of refusing to provide of allowing super rich Trump backers to look cool while they make our lives impossible?

As artists, we occupy a somewhat unusual and often contradictory social position in American society. The more politically minded among us tend to stress the precariousness of our working and living conditions. There is nothing wrong with recognizing our vulnerability. The majority of us struggle financially and are exploited as cheap labor whether we teach, fabricate, or answer phones in galleries. But we also, as a group, operate in proximity to extreme wealth and power. Artists have a disproportionately high degree of access to the media. Artists also have an unusual degree of access to the rich, since they, after all, are the ones who buy art and manage the business of art. We are not always afraid to use that leverage. Now is the time to come together to conceive of ways that we can organize on the basis of how we are threatened by the political landscape and how we can wield influence on the powerful. An artists' strike — like the #J20 Art Strike — is just one small step, even if it feels to some like taking a leap.

COCO FUSCO

HOW ARE PEOPLE ARTICULATING THE NEED OF ART TO DO THINGS THAT AREN'T ABOUT ART?

We think that artist experiments outside of "art-sanctioned" spaces offer exciting potential for new forms of practice and interdisciplinary meaning-making. Laiwan's Movement For Two Grannies exhibited on Vancouver Skytrain platforms, Margaret Dragu's performance art aerobics classes, Cindy Mochizuki's fortune telling practice, Justine Chamber's choreographed Family Dinner as dance piece, and Hannah's own inhabitation of orienteering (the sport) as an aesthetic performance all provide instances of art creeping into spaces where it may not be expected or welcomed.

Examples of artist residencies in the public or civic realm also come to mind. Perhaps the best-known is Mierle Laderman Ukeles's longstanding and self-initiated residency with the City of New York Department of Sanitation, or the obscure failure of sculptor George Levantis's embedded residency, organized by the Artist Placement Group, aboard a shipping vessel in 1975 during which his sculpture was thrown overboard by the crew. So long as there isn't an expectation to be in service to predetermined ways of thinking, art practices that engage with diverse publics and that are situated in the public realm can expand perceptual possibilities for audiences and artists alike. Touch Sanitation's feminist acknowledgement of the often-unseen labor of sanitation workers and the promise of a lost, underwater sculpture-cum-marine habitat (?) are exciting examples of art being 'art' beyond and in spite of itself.

In our current project, Big Rock Candy Mountain (BRCM), the sense of taste is evoked in an elementary school environment. BRCM is a public artwork and collaboration with students at Queen Alexandra Elementary School, produced by Other Sights For Artists' Projects.
The project began with an audacious proposition: to create a candy factory in an elementary school. In reality, the project is a multi-stage process of research and creation that de-emphasizes gratuitous candy consumption and complicates relationships to sweets as objects of desire, fascination, exchange and economy. In this work the sense of taste is used to access notions of aesthetic judgement, as well as to explore the material qualities of candies and foods.

The ecology of the school and the student population requires us, as artists, to think and behave differently in relationship to the particularities of the environment. The infectious and energetic knowledge of the student population informs the work. And, the value generated by our collaborative work (in the form of a chocolate bar) makes way for unknown future experiments. As part of a 3-month engagement with a grade 3/4 class, we taste-tested a range of flavours and developed a miscellaneous vocabulary to describe them: sounds, shapes, words, elaborate fonts, synesthetic line drawings and emojis. With visits to-and-from East Van Roasters (a local chocolatier), the group learned about single-origin, fairly traded dark chocolate and navigated its tense (and tacky), conflation with cheap candy from the gas station nearby. SOUR VS SOUR is a clash of the tastes we've learned to see in opposition: natural vs synthetic flavour, adult vs kid desires, good vs bad choices, healthy food vs economic means. As influenced by EXTREME candy marketing to kids, (and their astute observations about how it functions), SOUR VS SOUR disguises bean-to-bar food politics as campy, crinkly, candy-bar realness. As a limited edition multiple, SOUR VS SOUR circulates first and foremost as candy, a smokescreen for art needing to arrive in places that aren't about art.

HELEN REED AND HANNAH JICKLING

CAN ARTISTS HELP PEOPLE APPRECIATE OR UNDERSTAND ABSTRACT FEELINGS?

I grew up being somewhat creative though I never thought much of it. Growing up as a newly immigrated teenager from the Philippines to the Silicon Valley—creativity didn't feel like a skill to be proud of. It simply felt like a necessary muscle to move in order to navigate the confusion of experiencing non-belonging and otherness as a high school student. Wanting a sense of belonging while trying to maintain a sense of individuality that seemed relevant to the culture that I existed in, I was naturally drawn towards the outcasts, the nerds, and the burnouts. I often question why I hung out with these guys as opposed to other Filipino teenagers. Now I am realizing that culturally, it was the freaks that seemed the most comfortable in expressing their feelings of alienation. Being a foreigner and gay, and in the closet at the time, it felt like I had too many weird feelings to contain in one body. It felt good to be around other people that seemed okay in expressing their inner confusion, misdirected or otherwise.

Beyond having a non-convincing goth phase, the first serious creative endeavor I was involved in was making web-pages on Geocities—a hobby that my high school friends and I took somewhat seriously. Wanting to make my Geocities website shine against the rest, I taught myself how to write code in HTML and CSS, and learn Dreamweaver and Photoshop. I started a page that was part bad advice-column and part fan page for local bands that I was really into. One of these bands was 10 in the Swear Jar. I later learned that one of the band members had a brother who was a net artist. From learning about him, I eventually learned about other net artists that he was affiliated with through LiveJournal. From his LiveJournal, I found all of these cool feminist artists that were making work primarily for online viewing. For these artists, most of whom were photographers, LiveJournal provided a platform that democratized personal expression in a public forum. That really resonated with me so I emulated all of the things they were doing and became an interloper in their community. Not having a full understanding of feminist theory or what it means to be able to express feelings in all of their complexity, I was mainly expressing utter confusion. Because of this, I didn't really feel a sense of full belongingness in that world either though looking back at it now, it was probably an effective way for me to recognize inner confusion within myself without fully recognizing the trajectory that such an act would take me to.

Having been inspired by all of these web presences, I was seriously pursuing a career as a web designer in community college, but I was eventually dissuaded by someone who told me that third graders in Silicon Valley were already learning how to make websites. The endeavor eventually felt pointless. Though counterintuitive to pursuing a safe career, it seems right that I ended up pursuing a Fine Arts degree instead. I think there was an inner drive within me that sought emotional intelligence as a way to prepare me for adulthood. Taking a drawing class at age twenty allowed me to communicate my internal perception in ways that felt affirming without being too narrowly focused on my incapacity for proper technique or usage like I would in English or Math. I was lucky enough to have art teachers that were pluralistic and had little regard for narrow conventions. Through art, I intuitively cultivated self-awareness that allowed me to begin to understand my somatic experience and history beyond the confines of what felt permissible. Art allowed me to be comfortable with accessing my own reality in all of its messiness. I think it is the aspect of art which allows one to delve deeper within a subconscious act that allows for understanding abstract experiences and emotions. Though sometimes, worrying about career and the future might make someone completely miss this point though that in itself is an expression of a very abstracted reality now that I think about it.

RALPH PUGAY

WHAT IS CRITICAL THINKING? HOW IS IT USED?

When you have to go to the dictionary to look something up, you are already off to a bad start. When you go to that dictionary and you learn the definition and find yourself satisfied with it, you are in deeper trouble. If you read the sentence that the dictionary provides for context, **"Professors often find it difficult to encourage critical thinking amongst their students,"** and it rings true, you are in the pit of despair. When you realize you identify with the title professor but you are technically an "adjunct" professor, you feel slighted but also powerful and free because an adjunct is defined as "not essential but rather supplementary" so if you are not essential you can read half of the emails and avoid all of the bureaucratic meetings and just teach. You can be a teacher. Then you realize that what you attempt to teach is "critical thinking." Your class alludes to something else, it is called "Contemporary Art 1," and you are supposed to be teaching Contemporary Art History. However, you use that time to ask, "What is Contemporary Art History?" You know that is the only question you can ask, because, you are not a historian... and really the historians got it wrong. So many omissions, they weren't thinking critically about their own field. Despite the title and subject of the class, they have asked you to teach what you know. What you know is that the now can't be historical. The now can only be questioning. Questioning is critical thinking. You are no expert but you believe in round situations and round time. Critical thinking could be about making square thought, or square subjects ...round. Critical thinking could be an egg. An egg isn't round but it is close to round and therefore it is curious, imperfect/perfect, puzzling...a mystery. You crack the egg and make it into 300000000000000000 things, or you fertilize it and it grows into an animal that makes more eggs, or you stare at it and say "thank you egg for all that you are," or you throw it at houses, or you get egg on your face or on your prayer shawl. My mom used to say about our neighbor, "He has egg on his prayer shawl!" in complete disgust...so it must have the same meaning as "egg on your face." It is an embarrassment, or a stain. Maybe the egg is not even a chicken egg, which is what I have been describing, but a human egg, or a drawing of an egg, or a photo of cracked egg on the cover of a book by Sara Greenberger Rafferty. Or an egg could be a concept. A conceptual egg. Still something to crack. You can call someone an egg head! Which means that someone is an intellectual, or an academic. An egg head could be a critical thinker, but if they define themselves as an academic, they probably aren't. They aren't because they believe in academia, and when you believe in something you sometimes don't question it. When you question, you become critically engaged. Which is critical thinking in use and being used.

KRISTAN KENNEDY

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN PEOPLE THINK ABSTRACTLY TOGETHER?

Thinking in conversation with other people is a way we can extend our ability to perceive the world beyond our own limited perspective. Most of my artworks are appeals for people to join me in thinking about questions or propositions that don't have any easy resolution. Often this takes the form of making a setting or prop to invite people to join me in publicly discussing somewhat abstract topics, many of which have to do with people's personal relationship to American democracy. While these discussions may or may not change my mind or theirs it is the process of sharing this inquiry together, and striving to understand each other that makes the work matter more than any individual expressive statement. Through shared thinking processes we expand and elaborate the contours of our known world.

There are multiple ways that thinking with other people can move us beyond ourselves. Most basically we learn from hearing how different ideas and experiences look from someone else's perspective, which allows us to consider new approaches and issues that might never occur to someone in our life position. Beyond that, through the act of trying to articulate our own thoughts for the sake of the other people listening we reconfigure and see anew what we hold in our minds and can learn from ourselves. This is part of the reason why an audience is an essential ingredient of art, because through the act of shaping our meaning for other's understanding it takes new forms, forms that are only possible because they are shaped in a communicative relationship between people.

During my projects convening conversations with strangers, and in my classroom discussions, and even when talking with my good friends it is often stunning to recognize the distance between us and the differences of mental landscapes we are navigating in order to communicate with each other. And yet many of my most significant shifts of perspective have come through discussions with other people. It is heartening to recognize that dissonance and confusion are intertwined with the glowing moments of each new shared understanding. We are almost never thinking completely in step with each other but the friction between ideas can move our thoughts into new territory.

Thinking abstractly isn't ever only abstract, it is the process of making connections between our own tangible life experiences, our open questions and the history of other people's efforts to understand living in this world, whether that is through scholarship, culture, or other ways of knowing.

Abstract thinking grows out of wondering, experiential knowledge and a sense of relationship with other people who compel us to think again, people through whom we begin to see our own thinking as part of a history of human thought. This ability to reflect upon and question our own conceptual structures is an important form of freedom.

It is critical perspective for which we need the company of other people thinking alongside us, but from a different angle. I'm curious about these freedoms for which we are interdependent.

ARIANA JACOB

WHAT DO PEOPLE DO IN ART MUSEUMS?

A MUSEUM IS A PALE PINK STONE

In 2002, MoMA moved to a remote warehouse location in Queens while expanding its permanent headquarters in midtown. After spending a major part of my college education devoted to art history and theory, I visited the infamous modern art museum for the first time at its pied-a-terre in the Long Island City industrial warehouse. Two planes, two subways, one bus, and a long walk through an unfamiliar neighborhood. It was cavernous and raw, as temporary white walls cascaded over concrete, and makeshift metal ramps and stairs mazed through a massive single story layout. It was not the museum I expected. Still, after what was a slow and methodical viewing of all the classics, I reached a breaking point when I saw Matisse's "Dance" and without warning found myself crying. I hadn't really processed the entire sensory experience until that moment, in front of a ring of dancing women.

To see an ocean for the first time/ to see a brush stroke where there was none in the flat two-dimensional reprint in your weathered library book/ to listen to echoes of people all around you caring and not caring simultaneously, in unison/ to think about the historical beginnings of perspective shifts/ to think about male privilege/ to think about art school/ to wonder about the security guards / to not touch/ to think about dancing/ to evaluate the length of a pilgrimage/ to question how we value what is invaluable/ to see a seminal work on an industrial warehouse wall

In 2004 the minimalist architect Tadao Ando designed and built the Chichu Museum directly into the southern edge of Naoshima, an island fishing community in Kagawa Prefecture, Japan. An underground museum, Chichū Bijutsukan literally translates to "art museum in the earth." Every inch of this museum is crafted with rigid intention, designed specifically for the permanent display of work by three artists: Walter De Maria, Claude Monet, and James Turrell. It's lit entirely by natural light from skylights above, spotting the outside cliffed mountain with triangles, rectangles, squares and circles, the only forms visible

in the wild landscape surrounding the museum. Two planes, two subways, three trains, one ferry, and a long very steep hike up a winding jungle road. I landed, sweat-covered, at the pristine gates of the Chichu in the fall of 2016 with no expectations or understanding of what I was about to see. Every angle, wall surface, light source, hallway, courtyard and guard outfit worked in harmony to create the most site-specific, deeply devoted exhibition space ever made. Traversing down concrete hallways surrounding a traditional japanese rock and bamboo courtyard, I was ushered into a dark room to take off my shoes. Before I knew it, coming out of the shadows, wearing the required little white slippers, I found myself in front of a perfectly lit giant sprawl of purple and green paint, a quintessential Monet lilypad pond, set within a rounded white room paved with thousands of tiny white marble cobblestones, with a small silent security guard in an all-white kimono set (making the scene scene slightly sci-fi). The whole thing was too much, standing in front of this larger-than-life painting. Looking down at the ground I spotted, among the sea of little white inset pebbles, one tiny pale pink stone imbedded directly to the right of my slippered foot. Again, I found myself in tears (weary and dirty from the jungle), consumed completely by that glorious imperfection.

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LIBBY WERBEL

WHO IS THE MUSEUM FOR?

I suppose the answer to this question depends on who you are and whom you ask. Since it's been posed to me, an educator at the Portland Art Museum, I will respond by saying: their communities.

In my opinion, at their very best, art museums are reflections of and in service to their local communities. They are reflections of the people and places in which they take shape, form, and live their lives. Yes, I believe that like people, art museums have lives--lives that are at times beautiful and thoughtful, messy and difficult, awkward and indifferent, but perhaps above all else, complicated. I know it's hard to think of a large, abstract institution like an art museum as having a life, but try to go there with me if you will.

This year the Portland Art Museum celebrates its 125th birthday. A child of the early-twentieth century Progressive Era, the institution's early leaders (Google the name Anna Belle Crocker and be wowed) raised the Museum to be a civic-minded, educational institution that served a broad and general public. Don't ever forget that for its first 100 years or so the Museum also included the Museum Art School (now Pacific Northwest College of Art). In answering the question Who is the art museum for? I think it's worthwhile to get specific, and to sequence the DNA of our particular institution to try to truly understand its history. It won't always be pretty, of course, there is always plenty to find fault with inside institutional structures, but there are also core values and threads that help us connect past to present.

In 2014, as part of an artist-in-residency project, socially engaged artist Jen Delos Reyes worked with Education staff to create an illustrated "History of Engagement Timeline" for the Portland Art Museum by going through our uncatalogued archives and surfacing the myriad programs and exhibitions that sought to connect art, community, and contemporary life. So, for my intellectual exercise in answering the question Who is the art museum for? I present a tiny sample of the Portland Art Museum's community engagement history to point out an enduring truth about life-- what's old is often new, and what's new is often old. After reading through these moments you might begin to formulate your own nuanced answer to, Who is the art museum for?

1911-12

- Established a partnership with Portland Public schools.
- Hosted Sunday afternoon civic lectures on Portland city planning.
- Hosted talks with local Portland artists.
- Hosted Reed College extension course Education and the Citizen
- Organized free weekly Sunday talks for "car men" defined as "conductors and motormen, families, and friends."

1913-14

- School visits to Museum along with assistance to teachers in form of lists of pictures.
- Ongoing loans of photos of paintings to school classrooms.
- Lectures for educators such as "Art as an Ultimate Interpretation" and "The Psychophysical Effect of a Work of Art"

1915-16

- Portland Art Museum becomes one of first museums in the U.S. to have a docent employed by the public school system to serve students at school and at museum.

1937-39

- Hosted children's story hours on Greek & Egyptian life.
- Free Sunday afternoon concerts.
- Museum open on Wednesdays from 7–10PM.
- Exhibition of work by local Works Progress Administration (WPA) artists.
- Robert Tyler Davis appointed Museum Director. He described the Museum "as an Educational Laboratory."
- A local radio show, "Make Up Your Mind," broadcast from the Museum each Sunday morning in which Reed College and U of O professors discussed 2 objects on view to teach listeners how to make aesthetic judgments. Listeners were also asked to vote on their favorite paintings.
- The Bureau of Parks lent plants to make the Museum galleries more "human."

1941

- Organized sculpture classes for blind youth and exhibited their work.
- Organized "Backstage" tours of the Museum.
- "Arts Bureau" established to register artists for service to the community.

1942

- Hosted Modern Mexican Painters exhibition as a gesture of a "Good Neighbor Policy."
- Anti Axis Powers cartoon and political posters exhibitions.
- WWII Air raid shelter built at Museum.
- Hosted Annual Field Day for high school students interested in careers as an artist
- Studio space set aside during summer for service men, Museum exhibited their work.
- Exhibition of Museum objects organized for nearby military camps and service centers.

1948-49

- Hosted a series of children's/ youth art exhibitions
- Established the "Our Art Museum" program in which a script was prepared by a museum docent and delivered by a student over school broadcasting system at Benson Polytechnic High School. In later versions the program became a discussion between students and docents.

1970

- "The Suitcase Museum" program began. This program allowed Museum staff to travel to offsite locations to give presentations on select objects from the Museum's collection a discussion between students and docents.

1971

- The Museum instituted Urban Walking Tours, environmental tours for students and adults designed to instill an awareness of the economic, social, and environmental forces that create spaces.

1975-76

- Museum staff attended U.S. naturalization proceedings to give new citizens information about the Museum's offerings.

1978

- Museum offered children's movement classes in the galleries in connection with an exhibition of Alexander Calder's work.

1987

- Museum hosted programs in conjunction with two exhibitions *Lost and Found Traditions: Native American Art 1965-1985* and *New Directions Northwest: Contemporary Native American Art*. These included invocations and blessings, dancing, drumming, and singing performed by Native American leaders in the community.

1989

- Museum addresses the "culture wars" controversy surrounding the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) after it funded a controversial Robert Mapplethorpe exhibition. The Museum asked members to write their representatives to stress the Museum's need for NEA funding and to express disapproval of censorship in the arts.

1990

- The Museum recognized "A Day Without Art" on December 1. This was the second year of a national event that asked art organizations to draw attention to the AIDS crisis and its particular relevance to the arts community. The Museum draped the front façade with three black banners and exhibited several sections of the NAMES Project AIDS Memorial Quilt, including the panel for Keith Haring, who died of AIDS in early 1990.

1992

- The Tibetan Foundation of Oregon and Southeast Washington presented its First Annual Tibetan Cultural Festival at the Museum. Monks from Namgyal Monastery worked 10 to 12-hour days for a month to create a Kalachakra sand mandala on the second floor of the Museum.
- In keeping with the politically charged art world of the time, the museum organized a contemporary art exhibition titled Dissent, Difference and the Body Politic. The exhibition explored issues of multiculturalism, race, gender, and sexuality, and was organized in support of the "community-wide effort to explore the diversity of American culture and mobilize against hate crime and prejudice." Barbara Kruger's work appeared on local billboards, bus ads, and matchbooks.

1999

- Art Explorers (ArtX) was a new program for high schoolers that allowed students to learn about museums from the inside, while acting as volunteers. For the pilot year, 30 students were selected to help design the program for future members.

2010

- The Museum developed and opened Object Stories, which aimed to engage new audiences in storytelling about the meaning of personal objects. A booth was created to record visitors' stories, which were later shared with the public in the Museum's galleries and online. The project's philosophy was articulated as: "Object Stories is an open-ended inquiry into the relationship between people and things, and the Museum and its communities."

2013

- In conjunction with the bicycle design exhibition Cyclepedia, the Museum partnered with organizers of the World Naked Bike Ride to begin its late-night ride in the South Park Blocks. The Museum offered a special admission rate to riders ($1 per article of clothing, not including shoes). Almost 2,000 nude—or nearly nude—people entered the Museum to view the Cyclepedia exhibition.

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2015

- The Museum opened the Center for Contemporary Native Arts dedicated to presenting the work and perspectives of contemporary Native artists. At the core of the Center's mission is the Museum's commitment to partner with Native artists in co-creating the exhibitions, interpretation, and programming for the space.

2016

- In conjunction with exhibitions featuring artists Andy Warhol and Corita Kent, the Museum partnered with the Independent Publishing Resource Center (IPRC) to host Portland Prints, a series of artist residencies, tours, and classes featuring the art of screenprinting. On select weekends, artists created original screenprints often in response to current events and the 2016 presidential election. Thousands of free prints were passed out on site, and some even made their way to the January 2017 Women's March on Washington.

STEPHANIE PARRISH

HOW DO MUSEUMS SUPPORT CRITICAL DIALOGUES ABOUT SOCIAL ISSUES AND POLITICS?

I believe art museums today face a complex condition. They are institutions called to collect, care for, and share cultural histories. Art museums–from encyclopedic to contemporary–are responsible to us, the public, the people that make the culture they are called to steward. As our own cultural narratives expand to include historically underrepresented, suppressed or marginalized groups of people, museums face a reality that includes not only reflecting the present but also rethinking the past. This is political.

- How can art museums publicly explore critical issues that may be unresolved (or in process) internally?
- How do art museums take a political stance without possibly marginalizing a portion of their audience, staff or funders? Who are they responsible to first?
- How can art museums function as both a safe space and a place for debate and provocation?
- Which social issues should art museums address? Which shouldn't they? Who decides this?
- Are art museums responsible for expanding (or revising) their collection's narrative to include historically underrepresented or marginalized groups of artists?
- Who should choose the artists and objects that are collected?

These are questions many museums are asking themselves– and the answer is murky at best. Art museums have a complex hierarchy of constituents they are responsible to in addition to their public – from foundations, corporations, boards and individuals to local, state or federal governments. These entities' relationships to museums have their own social and political challenges. So how then can an art museum, under these conditions, support critical dialog about these very issues? Of course there is no simple answer to such a complex question but I'd like to propose that the art museums that have been most effective in serving as a space for these dialogs are those that work intentionally. In this context, intentionality refers to *being about, representing, or standing for,* or a practice that is consciously and publicly aspiring to a set of stated values.

Art museums that work with this type of intention hold a set of values they seek to reflect both in their philosophy (mission or vision) and practice. They are:

- **Responsible,** to themselves and their public, the people they are in service of
- **Part of a community,** not at the center of it
- **Self-reflective and adaptive,** willing to change in support of what is most important to them
- **Realistic,** seeing opportunities while recognizing their limitations (they make choices)
- **Responsive,** interested in addressing the needs of their community by serving them
- **Imperfect,** accepting and learning from missteps (which are inevitable)
- **Challenged,** willing to work through complex thinking and relationship building processes
- **Consistent,** a place that supports its community even in difficult political or social environments
- **Aspirational,** a place that is motivated by being part of ensuring a better future
- **Human,** seeing their organization as a group of individuals working collectively for others

Art museums, by virtue of their own narratives, have and continue to be places for social and political dialog. Their work in supporting this will always, as it should, be a process.

SHEETAL PRAJAPATI

WHAT DO YOU PERCIEVE TO BE THE ROLE OF ARTISTS IN SOCIETY AT LARGE?

In my role as a director of community engagement and public programs for a contemporary art center, I am dually charged with broadening and diversifying community access to and participation in the arts, while deepening critical inquiry and scholarly engagement in connection with the social, political, cultural, and aesthetic contexts of artists' practices. Or what you might describe as an attempt to explode who art codified as "contemporary" has traditionally been made by and for while potentially narrowing the accessibility and relevance of the content and conversation surrounding that work. Or what you might call the simultaneous expansion and constriction of contemporary art's audiences, and perhaps even its possibilities. It goes without saying that this position feels conflicted, and I suspect many artists and cultural workers are charged with similar personal and professional values and mandates.

So often, public programs in the arts naively and in some ways reductively claim to aspire to gather a "diverse" audience of artists, activists, academics, and community members within "inclusive" spaces for arguably sexy but vague code phrases and buzzwords like: generative dialogue, discussion, and dissonance; opportunities for un-prescribed exchange; containers for creative research; experiments in radical thinking, peer learning, and pedagogy; and temporary autonomous zones for radical re-imagining, all rooted in a value system that assumes these conversations could not take the particular shape or substance they do without being catalyzed by contemporary art and artists.

Would it be irresponsible to desire anything less? Or does the real irresponsibility lie in the assumption that we can or should even come close to such things if we take into account the deeply ingrained, and perhaps inescapable, inequities and infinite -isms upon which the alternative as much as mainstream art world's systems and frameworks of support are built and sustained? In other words, whose utopia are we describing?

In designing and curating educational and public programs in connection with contemporary art and performance programs as well as an annual festival, I often invite academics to serve as guest scholars in public conversation with artists and audiences, prioritizing women, non-binary, and queer people of color. Past scholars' areas of research have spanned performance studies, art history, dance and choreography, aesthetics and politics, gender and sexuality studies, and cultural anthropology. I often encourage them to use the artistic programs, programs and parties as sites for experimental research, inquiry, and exchange through lectures, responsive writing, workshop facilitation, panel moderation, artist conversation, and even socializing. Their objects of inquiry, theoretical vocabularies, and political commitments are always far-ranging--from Black queer women's nightlife spaces, to feminist and queer choreography, to conceptual performance art, to archival memory in Lebanon--but all have relished an opportunity for direct interaction with artists and audiences outside a traditional academic context. Yet despite an embrace of the chance to stretch definitions and methods of research, and the invitation to take creative license with format and structure, there is still sometimes a visible struggle to break with habits of formality, high theory, and other betrayals of entrenched disciplinary training. In other words, despite our best intentions (both my own and the scholars'), an insistence on a kind of criticality dressed in academic language persists, leaving me to wonder:

- In contemporary art, do we attempt to inject our programs with a discernible degree of criticality signaled only by indiscernible language, or a fetishization of theoretical jargon and even educational aesthetics when it is artists' and community members' perspectives that should be foregrounded?
- When do we think we know when intellectual rigor is present or at work in the room?
- In our aim for criticality, are we reinforcing elitism while striving for inclusion? Favoring the professionalization and academicization of the arts while alienating communities with whom we are trying to do long-term trust-building, collaborating, and listening work?
- When we emphasize or elevate the level of critique, what other kinds of conversations and dynamics are foreclosed?

I have witnessed other (arguably healthy) tensions surface in recent public events I've programmed—a vocal division between those who want to leave with a sense of harmony, solidarity, and clarity, and others who seek a kind of critical engagement associated with public displays of difference and dissent.

- A guest scholar sitting on a panel overrode the moderator's conclusion about the conditions of making contemporary art under imperialism, a violent quotidian, and oppressive regimes by asserting that it was borderline unethical to end the public discussion with an emphasis on warmth, generosity, and commonality, instead asserting the palpability and reality of death, destruction, and despair for artists and activists working and living in ceaselessly war-torn and traumatized contexts. In short, it wasn't enough to believe in art.
- A panel of emerging women artists, curators, and producers of color emphasized making art, performance, nightlife and other social spaces for healing, gathering, self-care, and love, especially in their own communities, calling for less critique amongst artists and within art programs, and more internal and external critique of institutions themselves.
- An artist openly critiqued the program's marketing language, asking why their work—and that of other artists of color—were so often framed by notions and questions of "race", as if it dominates or determines the scope of their creative practice, or as if White artists' work isn't also always already informed by (their own) race, and Whiteness.
- A focus group comprised of Portland teens, young adults, and emerging artists of color found a lack of joy, celebration, and heart in the contemporary performances and exhibitions they experienced. In a report from the group, summarized by an artist in residence who served as an adult researcher with youth on the project, it was said that: "When life is relatively easy – like for most White contemporary art audiences seeking critical discourse and benefitting from White supremacy—they turn to art that is difficult, and which tends to present the horrors and injustices of the world as if they were rare anomalies. However, when the horrors and injustices are a part of a person's daily experience, as they tend to be for people of color, the idea that they are anomalous and rare can be off-putting and alienating – a misalignment around how injustice is perceived and dealt with in cultural practices."

In the interest of collective inquiry and learning—which is, for me, the heart of criticality—I'll conclude with a few questions for rumination:

- For whom is the contemporary art world employing a critical language and framing of ideas? When we do so, are we accessible to the broader audiences and communities the contemporary art field claims the imperative to engage? That is, are criticality and accessibility mutually exclusive? How do we close the gap?
- Do we actually invite space for critique of our own institutions, live and in public?
- How much dissonance or dissensus do we want, and why do we want it?
- Can we strive for critical love?

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